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DISCERNMENT
Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Preaching That Leads to Transformation

Curtis Barbarick

***Abstract**: This article presents the results of a project to develop a process whereby the sermon would be enhanced for listeners at the North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas, so that preaching would be more effective in leading to transformation. The theology and methodology of John Wesley were utilized as a lens by which to think about and implement this practice.*

The intervention involved a six-week session with a focus group that represented a cross-section of the congregation. Participants in this group were asked to engage in a lectio divina *exercise on a particular text daily, journal about the experience, listen attentively to the sermon on the same text on Sunday morning, and meet with a group of others who were engaged in the same practices for the purpose of discussion. Group members were to propose ways in which they might be able to implement, in the coming week, what they learned. Each was encouraged to choose one of those possible implementations and practice it. The following meeting would begin with a discussion of the implementation.*

The sermon is over and the preacher retires. It is now Monday morning and the preacher is in a reflective mood. "What was actually accomplished in the sermon yesterday morning? Was anyone changed? Do they come here week after week out of habit? Is this my life's purpose; to hold up the charade of religion so that people can live self-centered lives?"

One need not have been a practitioner of the preaching art for long for such thoughts to creep in, largely because the preacher is not seeing significant change in those who hear the sermons week in and week out. Richard Rohr echoes this: "As a preacher, I find that I am forced to dumb down the material in order to interest a Sunday crowd that does not expect or even want any real challenge; nor does it exhibit much spiritual or intellectual curiosity."[1] As a result of these observations, the preacher

[1] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward* (Jossey-Bass; San Francisco, 2011), 14.

begins to question the vocation. "Does preaching really work? Is it inherently flawed? Is it an art that is now passé with the advancement of technology?"

"What is the matter with preaching?" Harry Emerson Fosdick posed that question in a 1928 essay he wrote for Harper's Weekly.[2] His answer was that preaching in his day was largely irrelevant to the lives of the listeners. He argued that the sermon should address some spiritual problem and seek to resolve it. Fosdick introduced a turn to the listener that has been picked up by a number of other authors, each one attempting to move the preacher to pay more attention to the concerns and thoughts of the listener. In turning to the listener the preacher makes adjustments so that the sermon is more impactful for the listener.

But what if the turn to the listener was actually a turn *to* the listener? That is, what if it was not only the preacher who made adjustments, but the listeners did as well? What if the listeners did something to prepare themselves to hear the sermon? What if the listeners did something so that the sermon could lead to transformation?

A Lack of Transformation

There is evidence that there is not much transformation happening among Christians in North America. A number of studies suggest that the lifestyle of Christians is not significantly different than that of non-Christians.[3] Part of the reason not much transformation is happening, in my experience, is that much of our theology is not directed towards transformation. Many Christians have a static understanding of salvation where the goal is to get to heaven when you die. Whereas the bar was once held high to get your ticket to heaven punched (regular church attendance, moral practices, commitment to ministry, etc.), cheap grace allowed us to lower the bar. Getting to heaven, not transformation into the image of Christ, has become the goal. These issues have been a challenge for the North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas.

North Street was established in the early 1960s. Those that started the North Street congregation were originally members of a congregation in town that was of a non-cooperation spirit.[4] Because they felt disenfranchised by the non-cooperation attitude in that congregation, they

[2] Harry Emerson Fosdick, "What is the Matter with Preaching?" *Harper's Magazine* (July 1928): 133-141.

[3] For example, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

[4] Non-cooperation churches within the fellowship of Churches of Christ are opposed to congregations pooling their resources to support mission efforts or orphan homes. In Nacogdoches the non-cooperation church has also opposed having a kitchen or gym in the church building.

left to begin what became North Street. The group first began meeting on the west side of town before building the facility on North Street about two years later (1964). East Texas has been the hub of those who represent the non-cooperation faction of Churches of Christ. An example of this was the re-establishment of the *Gospel Guardian* in nearby Lufkin by Foy E. Wallace and Fanning Yater Tant in 1949. This perspective continues to be well-represented in East Texas.

In 1966 North Street hired Bill Sherrill to serve as the preaching minister. Sherrill spent a great deal of time focusing on the grace of God. His preaching and the congregation's acceptance of those who were not welcomed in other Churches of Christ in the area helped the congregation grow and flourish. This atmosphere of acceptance continues today as some drive as far as seventy-three miles to attend North Street because they consider the churches in their area too rigid and judgmental. Sherrill continued as the preaching minister until 1999 and remains with the congregation as the family minister and an elder.

Preaching grace has the potential of abuse (Jude 4). There may be some that choose to use God's grace as a license to sin or simply as an excuse not to grow in their relationship with God. There are indications the teaching of God's grace at North Street has led some to these conclusions. Transformation seems either unnecessary or unimportant. Sherrill himself says that he believes that grace has been misunderstood and abused. Thus a static understanding of salvation and a misunderstanding of grace have created obstacles to transformation.

In addition to theological obstacles, there is a structural obstacle. That is, there has been no teaching structure in place to help church members in the transformational process. Specifically, there is no structure which would enhance the sermon for transformation.[5]

In a fellowship that has placed great stress on being analytical, we have assumed that if everyone received the proper information it would be implemented. In this environment preaching has been about imparting information and listening has been a passive exercise. Listeners come to the sermon unprepared to hear the word of God. While the text of the sermon to be preached is often read during the worship service, the listeners have typically not read the text themselves before arriving for worship. Oddly enough, the church is one of the few places in which the learner is not usually expected to do any preparation before the lesson.

[5] I focus on the sermon because it is generally understood to be the primary way that one is taught about becoming like Christ. Certainly learning opportunities such as Bible class can contribute to transformation.

Additionally, a single learning style (listening) is too often used in presenting the lesson. Educators have long emphasized the importance of using a variety of learning styles as well as active listening if significant learning is to take place. If congregations and preachers hope for the sermon to lead to transformation, they should pay attention to the insights of educators.

The intervention in this project addressed the structural challenges at North Street by developing a systematic approach for listeners to prepare themselves to hear the sermon, learn from others regarding what was taught in the sermon, and putting what they have learned into practice.[6] I addressed the theological issues through lessons focused on a richer and deeper understanding of grace and a more dynamic understanding of salvation.

A Theological and Methodological Lens

The language of transformation comes from the apostle Paul, who speaks of having a transformed mind (Rom. 12:2) and undergoing a continual transformation under the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:13). The transformation is from that of people under the power of sin to people who reflect the character of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Further, Paul speaks of his entire ministry in terms of transformation: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you . . ." (Gal. 4:19).

In examining the problem of a lack of transformation, I wanted to know if there were others that faced similar theological challenges. When, during the history of the church, did a theologian/preacher attempt to encourage transformation but run into theological issues that prevented it? What methodology did he use to encourage people to grow in grace and experience transformation? In what way, if any, was the sermon utilized for this purpose? I found an appropriate lens in John Wesley.

Wesley's Theology[7]

Wesley was an eclectic theologian. This is demonstrated nowhere better than in his understanding of humanity and sin. At one moment Wesley uses Reformed language to speak of Adam as the federal head, moves to Augustinian rhetoric to describe fallen humanity, shifts to

[6] The complete project is found in: Curtis Barbarick, "Preaching that Leads to Transformation at The North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas," DMin thesis (Abilene Christian University, 2014). http://digitalcommons.acu.edu/dmin_theses/11

[7] For further reading on the theology of John Wesley see Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994) and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007).

Orthodox expressions of sin as sickness, and finally, couches free will in Arminian terms. His eclectic approach however, was always with an eye towards his primary concern; that the sovereignty of God neither suggested that God was the author of sin nor negated human responsibility in becoming holy. As God is holy so we are to be holy. We were made in the image of God and are called to reflect that image.

For Wesley, being made in the image of God meant that humans were made like God in love. "As God is love," wrote Wesley, "so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an 'image of his own eternity,' an incorruptible picture of the God of glory."[8] For Wesley, it is axiomatic that love entails liberty otherwise, humans would be no more capable of serving their creator than a piece of earth. Without liberty they could not have been capable of virtue or holiness because they could not have chosen such. One cannot choose to love or practice virtue unless one is free to do so. Therefore, for humans to be beings who would love like God, they must be free. Thus, if humans are to grow in holiness they must exercise their free will to cooperate with God's grace.

Wesley's position regarding cooperation with God resonates well with Scripture. Peter wrote that God's divine power has given everything we need, and then proceeded to instruct Christians to add to this (2 Pet. 1:3-5). Peter also encouraged Christians to make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10) and to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Likewise, Jesus encouraged his disciples to make every effort to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24), to seek the kingdom first (Matt. 6:33), and to deny themselves and take up their cross (Matt. 16:24). Paul encouraged Christians to "Keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25) and to think on things that are excellent and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8). It is evident from these texts and many others that God has made us collaborators in God's good intentions for us.

Wesley took exception to atonement theories in his day that seemed to remove human responsibility. If the atonement is understood to be objective only, then we easily become passive instruments of God's grace in our lives. An objective theory states that, as a result of the cross, God has intervened, justified us, and now sees us through the blood of Christ, not as the sinners that we actually are. In an objective understanding of the

[8] John Wesley, "Justification by Faith," ed. Albert Outler, vol. 2 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 84.

atonement, all change is change within God. There is no need for us to be formed into the image of Christ or engage in God's mission in the world.

However, as Wesley pointed out, this is simply God playing a trick on God's own mind. God knows that we are not changed, but chooses to see us as changed. Yet we have noticed that Scripture speaks of us actually being transformed into the image of Christ, not simply appearing to be transformed. But an objective understanding of the atonement sees no need for a change in us. It only suggests that God looks at us differently, not that we actually are different. A subjective understanding suggests that something happens within us because of the cross and that we are being transformed now into what God wants us to be as a result.

If one sees the atonement through a subjective lens, transformation is not an option for Christians, but is inherent in their salvation. This is because transformation *is* salvation. Scripture continually reminds us that we are not just being saved from some future loss or destruction, but that we are being saved from something in the present (Acts 2:40; 1 Pet. 1:18). Sin seeks to destroy our lives and the lives of those around us *now*. God seeks to save us from the power of sin *now*. Thus salvation is more dynamic than static. That is, while salvation may be thought of as a past event (Eph. 2:5) that is consummated in the future (Rom. 5:9-10), it must also be understood as ongoing (1 Cor. 1:18).

One seeks transformation because it is the very life that God intends for us to have. This is made clear in the Gospel of John where Jesus states that he came that we would have life to the full (John 10:10). The term "life" in John's Gospel is not limited to the future. On the contrary, John states that those who have become followers of Jesus have life as a present possession (John 5:24; 6:47). Salvation is life. It is the best life possible. It is experienced now and will continue on into eternity.

When we understand salvation in terms of transformation, we can see why Christians are urged to go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1), grow in their salvation (1 Pet. 2:2), press on to the prize (Phil. 4:12-15), make every effort to add to their faith (2 Pet. 1:5), and to be transformed (Rom. 12:2). Transformation is not something to do to achieve salvation. Transformation is salvation. Becoming like Christ is becoming what God intends for us to be.

I have used the language of transformation while Wesley focused on sanctification, but they are actually the same. In the same way that salvation has past, present, and future elements, sanctification is also a past (1 Cor. 6:11), ongoing (1 Thess. 4:1-3), and future process (Eph. 4:13). The writer of Hebrews states, "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who

are being made holy" (Heb.10:14), fully integrating a past event with an ongoing process.

I chose to utilize John Wesley as a lens for developing the sermon for transformation at North Street for several reasons. (1) Wesley's theology is similar to that in Churches of Christ when it comes to matters of sin and free will. (2) Wesley saw the necessity of transformation (although he used the term "holiness"). (3) Because he was a pastor, Wesley's theology was practical. (4) Wesley implemented a methodology that would contribute to transformation. (5) The problem he sought to overcome is similar to that of North Street specifically, and North American Christianity, generally.

Wesley's Methodology

Although Wesley was a practical theologian known for his preaching to the masses, he may be better known for his methodology than his theology. He practiced a good deal of street preaching, giving what he called "awakening sermons." These sermons were intended to awaken people from the lethargy of a cold faith. However, once they were awakened, what should he do? Were the people to be left on their own to grow in holiness? Wesley faced a problem. There was no systematic way in which to reinforce the sermon.

As a result, Wesley established a small group ministry intended to help society members grow in holiness. The idea of small groups became apparent to him after he began his field preaching. Many of those who heard Wesley's preaching asked him to come teach them in their homes. He began doing this but soon discovered that there were too many; he could never manage to provide direction in holiness to so many in such small ways. Wesley found the resolution to this problem was the development of small groups.

He was far from the first to utilize such a method. In fact, Wesley himself noted that this seemed to be what the earliest Christians were doing. At the same time Wesley encouraged individual practices that would help the members to grow in holiness. For Wesley, the combination of preaching, personal devotion, and group interaction assisted growth in holiness. He always assumed that God provides the grace for growth, but that individuals were responsible to cultivate what the Spirit provides in their lives. Because Christianity is inherently relational, Christians were also to help one another with growth. Much of this growth would be stimulated by the preaching that they heard from Wesley or one of his lay preachers.

Intervention

Just as Wesley sought to develop methods to reinforce the sermon, the intent of my project was to provide a structure to enhance the sermon so that listeners may experience transformation into the image of Christ. The structure involved a process by which members of North Street were proactively engaged in the text of the sermon before it was preached, and engaged in communal reflection afterwards. I enlisted eight individuals who were members of North Street and who regularly attended Sunday morning worship. The participants represented a cross-section of the congregation. It was my hope that this project would provide the leadership of North Street a glimpse of how these practices might enhance the listening experience for individuals of all backgrounds in the congregation.

The participants were involved in several exercises each week. First, they practiced *lectio divina*[9] with the text provided, journaling about their findings. Afterwards, they attended worship, hearing the Scripture for the sermon read, and listening to the sermon. They also attended group meetings on the following Monday night and participated in a discussion of their *lectio divina* experiences and how those related to what they heard in the sermon. Group members were encouraged to challenge the sermon and one another in a godly and loving manner. Finally, the group formulated ways in which they could put what they learned into practice. I preached a series of sermons on "grace" over a six-week period and provided the Scriptures I used for these lessons to the participants. Below are some of the insights gained through the process.

Lectio Divina

Although group members were a little uneasy about engaging in *lectio divina* (the experience was new to everyone in the group), each one took to it quickly. Participants were in agreement that reading the text this way gave them greater insight than a casual reading of the text might provide. Although they may have read these Scriptures numerous times before, the practice of repetition with the text brought out facets of the text that previously made little or no impact. One of the participants said, "*lectio divina* has helped me to slow down when reading Scripture." Another commented, "When just reading through the Scripture, it is difficult to fully

[9] For this project I relied on Corrine Ware's description of *lectio divina*. In this practice, participants follow four basic steps: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio*. That is, they read, reflect on, respond to, and internalize a given text. See Corrine Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1995), 101-106. For another source see Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 90-117.

understand the message in just one pass. Continually reading and thinking on the verse, however, brings a better understanding and true knowledge of the message."

Participants also found journaling to be helpful in their *lectio divina* exercise. It was useful for keeping their thoughts in one place so that they could look back on them. Some referred to their journals in the group meetings. A few times during the weekly meetings, people actually read something from their journals and they often wrote in their journals during meetings. One participant said that it "helped by writing down the words or phrases that stood out—whether the text was confusing or made an emotional impact."

Hearing the Sermon

There was a consensus that doing the *lectio divina* exercise helped them to be more attentive to the sermon. In the interview with the IE (Independent Expert),[10] group members said that their time with the Scripture helped them with listening to the sermon, not just hearing it. They felt that they would be more inclined to remember the lesson after having spent time in the text themselves than if they had not. One woman participant shared that she and her husband (a non-participant) discussed the sermon on Sunday afternoon and she found that he did not receive as much from it as she did. She was convinced that it was because she prepared herself to hear it. On the questionnaire provided at the end of the project another person wrote, "I'm more inclined to write notes and listen well and remember what I've heard."

Preparing themselves to hear the sermon caused participants to look forward to the preaching event. They wanted to see how the lesson taught in the sermon compared to their own reading of the text. In the interview with the IE, one person commented, "Without this exercise, listening to the sermon was sometimes like 'whac-a-mole.' This process let us know 'where the mole would pop out.'" Field notes taken weekly during the group meetings reveal others had similar sentiments.

Group Learning

Once group members practiced *lectio divina* and engaged in the sermon, they came to the group as informed learners. Although I facilitated the group, the group itself was the teacher. Unlike Bible class sessions

[10] One of the methods of evaluating the effectiveness of this project were conversations with an IE (Independent Expert). For more details about that aspect of this work, please see the complete project thesis.

where there is often discussion about a passage without any prior reflection on the text, these group members spent the week immersed in the text and therefore drew deeply from their study when offering their interpretations. As they expressed their reflections on the text, they were teaching one another about the text.

In addition, group members shared how the text impacted their experiences. As individuals would hear of another's experience, they offered input from their own experience. This led one participant to say, "Discussion was helpful to me because it brought other ideas. These thoughts made some things click. It would not have made sense otherwise, which made it easier to remember and live out the message." Another commented that "talking through things helps to gain clarity of mind." These are examples of the ways in which group members continued to open up about themselves and confess the challenges that they were facing. In doing this they allowed others some entry into their lives and allowed them to speak into their lives as well.

Implementation

Although Christians realize that they should take what they have learned from sermons and implement them in their lives, they are often not deliberate about doing so. The result is that the lesson to be learned is not learned very well because it was never implemented. Imagine taking guitar lessons but never practicing the lessons at home. This project called for participants to verbally express in group meetings how these lessons could be implemented and then to challenge each one to choose at least one implementation to carry out in the coming week.

Because the theme of the lessons each week focused on grace, participants sought to practice grace each week. In each one of these cases the participants were stretching themselves to do what made them uncomfortable but that which made the practice of grace more real in their lives. Each found the experience formational for them. The whole experience caused the participants to be more aware of those who needed grace given to them and how they might provide it. The more that they learned about how God extended grace to them, especially in the life and death of Jesus, the more they seemed to be moved to extend it to others.

This final component seemed to have a significant impact on the group. On the questionnaire one participant said, "I am certainly more formed into [the image] what Christ would have me to be; knowing it is a process and that it is daily work on my part, with his guidance." The IE reported that the group said, "Perhaps the best part was the specific

challenge each week to put into practice what we had learned, especially to live more like Christ. That included an awareness of the receiving of grace, and the opportunities given to share this grace with others."

Validation of the Process

In educational circles it is well understood that students have different learning styles and teachers are more able to facilitate learning when they grasp how students learn. This project sought to take advantage of the varied learning styles that are present within the congregation. There was an audial (hearing the text read), reflective (*lectio divina*), communal (discussion), and action (practice) aspect to the project. While this in no way encompasses all of the learning styles listeners may have, it does provide more possibilities than merely hearing the sermon.

In addition to connecting with the varied learning styles, this project also connects with varied spiritual types (see Figure 1 – Spiritual Types).[11] The essence of these types is broken down into four quadrants (see below).

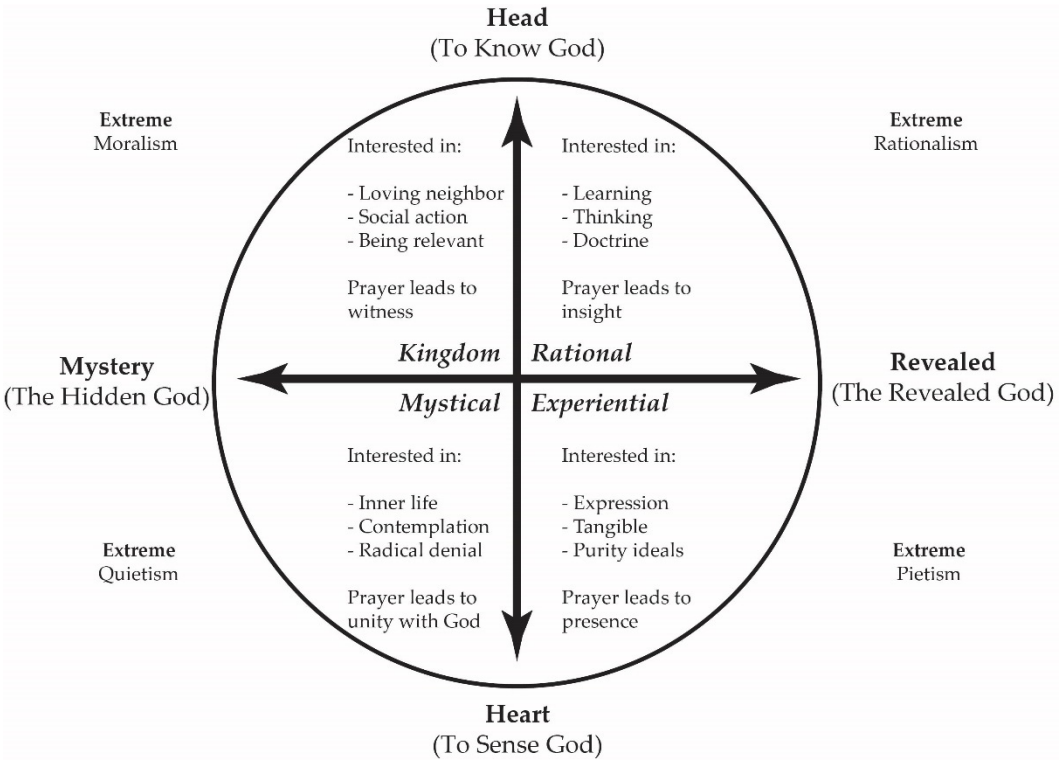

Figure 1 - Spiritual Types

The top and bottom of the quadrants represent an illumination (mind) and affective (heart) relationship with God, respectively. The left and right sides

[11] Ware, *Discover Your Spiritual Type*.

represent techniques, the left being the mysterious nature of God (*apophatic*) that cannot be known, while the right side represents the revealed side (*kataphatic*), which can be known. Research has shown a strong correlation between these spiritual types and learning styles.[12] Thus in connecting with the varied learning styles, this project is also appealing to the varied spiritual types present within the congregation.

Learning styles are defined differently by different researchers, but the common theme in each is that individuals process information differently and therefore learn in different ways.[13] Some learn best individually while others learn better in groups. Some are more audial, others more visual, and still others more tactile in their learning. There is agreement among researchers that students perform better when teaching matches the learning style of the individual student.[14]

The sermon is primarily an audial event that appeals to the *kataphatic mind* (Revealed/Head) spiritual type and the analytic learner learning style. Words, as we have long known, have power. One need only consider the words spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King that motivated a movement. Yet it is not simply the words that have power. The power also comes from the way that the words are spoken. The same words given by one that inspire can be given by another and fall flat. We need only think of one person's ability to tell a joke and another person's inability to tell the same joke.

The *lectio divina* exercise allows individuals to read and reflect on Scripture in a solitary manner. This fits the analytic learner who, according to Bernice McCarthy, "perceives information abstractly and processes it reflectively."[15] Such learners are content to sit alone and analyze a text. This mode of learning corresponds well with *kataphatic* (Revealed) spiritual types. Such types seek to know God and imagine that God, in some sense, can be known. However, because *lectio divina* encourages readers to consider ways to apply the text as well as to encourage them to open themselves to the voice of God and meditate on the words they read, the *apophatic* (Mystery) element is also represented.

The small group meeting fits the learning style of the imaginative learner. Such learners do well in groups where they can share ideas and

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[12] Young Woon Lee, "Relationship Between Spirituality Types and Learning Styles," *Torch Trinity Journal*, 1 (2000), http://www.ttgst.ac.kr/upload/ttgst_resources13/20123-143.pdf (accessed July 22, 2013).

[13] Ibid, 101, 103.

[14] Margaret F. Williamson and Roberta L. Watson, "Learning Styles Research: Understanding How Teaching Should Be Impacted by the Way Learners Learn," *Christian Education Journal*, (Spring 2007): 62-77.

[15] Bernice McCarthy, *Learning Type Measure (LTM), Teaching Style Inventory (TSI)* (Barrington, IL: 1985), 32, as quoted by Lee, 93.

hear the responses of others, and they also correspond well with the *kataphatic* spiritual types. Those from other disciplines have taken note of the value of group learning. For instance, Frederick Aquino, in writing about epistemology, argues that since no one person can know everything, each must rely on a vast range of specialists for knowledge. Therefore, knowledge is enhanced when those others, exercising epistemic virtues, come together.[16]

As relationships are nurtured over time, possibilities for growth occur because the development of such relationships provides a safe environment for learners. As relationships are nourished, each one in a group feels safe in allowing pre-existing ideas to be challenged. This feeling of safety allows each one to feel more comfortable in opening up to new possibilities. Ironically, some of the best learning comes when there is diversity in the group. No doubt this is due to the push back that occurs when the group is diverse rather than the group-think that may be prevalent when the group is homogeneous.

Common sense learners and dynamic learners learn best when they are able to test what knowledge they have gained in real world environments. Such learning has been a staple of education since the days of Aristotle. He argued that "Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it."[17] The final piece of the exercise integrated this learning style. Individuals attempted to actually do what they had learned and then process that action with the others at the next meeting. This learning mode fits well with the spirituality type known as the *apophatic mind* (Mystery/Heart).

Each of the activities that the listeners engaged in are intended not only to help them know more, but to know implicitly and then to move from knowing to being. Michael Polanyi argued that there is a kind of knowledge that one acquires through the practice of an activity.[18] For instance, one may study the physics of riding a bicycle but not be able to mount a bike and ride it down the street. Those who learn to ride the bike put physics to work, turning the wheel inward when they are about to fall. The more the bike is ridden, the more the skill is acquired. Those who have mastered the bicycle have learned well enough how to ride that they no

[16] Frederick Aquino, *Communities of Informed Judgment* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2004. See also Gary Piercy, "Transformative Learning Theory and Spirituality: A Whole-Person Approach," *Journal of Instructional Research* 2 (2013): 34-35.

[17] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, The Loeb Classical Library, T. E. Page and others, gen. eds., trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947), 2.73.

[18] See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

longer think about how it is to be done. They simply do it. They have tacit knowledge.

Rodney Clapp builds upon Polanyi's premise and argues for tacit holiness.[19] In the same way that people may acquire knowledge through learning and practicing, they may also acquire holiness. When people attempt to practice holiness with those with whom they interact during the week, they are formed by their actions. They are also formed by the interactions that they have within the group. There is potential for disagreements within the group, which could lead to serious conflict and behavior that would be anything but holy. But there is also potential for individuals to practice submission, love, respect, and a host of other virtues that would lead to holiness both individually and corporately.

As can be seen, individuals who engage in these activities are more likely to learn and to be transformed by the text and the sermon. Such learning, however, is not limited to individuals, but also lends itself to the formation of groups. When individuals engage in these activities with others, the group, as the body of Christ, begins to tacitly take on the holiness of Christ. It is at this point that both individuals and the group move from knowing to being.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The project demonstrated that when congregants are proactive in listening to the sermon, they are much more likely to be transformed by the preaching event. In addition, the experience and reflection of group members indicated that the dynamic of group interaction contributes to the transformation of people into the image of Christ. This reflects the Wesleyan ideal of social holiness. As Wesley discovered, the preacher cannot be everywhere to follow up with the preaching event, but those who heard the sermon could support, encourage, and admonish one another in regard to the lesson given. In this sense the group became the teacher.

The project further displayed that people learn best and therefore grow best when their varied listening styles are addressed. This process took advantage of the varied learnings styles and spiritual types inside our congregation and, I would suppose, are within most, if not all, congregations. While the sermon alone is limited as to how many learning styles it can address, the *lectio divina* practice, group meetings, and

[19] Rodney Clapp, "Tacit Holiness: The Importance of Bodies and Habits in Doing Church," in *Embodied Holiness*, eds. Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 62-78.

implementation all provided a fuller way for listeners to hear, understand, and assimilate the lesson.

Participants in the project expressed that this process helped them to be more attentive to the sermon and therefore the sermon impacted them in a more complete way. It helped them to listen to the sermon, not simply hear it. They expressed the value of *lectio divina* and learning from one another. However, some felt that the most significant part of the process was that of practicing what they learned.

If a preacher sought to use this approach within the congregation, I would suggest the following. (1) Plan ahead. Much planning is needed to map out the series to be studied and preached. Providing a plan for the congregation gives them a good feel for where they are going. (2) If the preacher chooses not to use *lectio divina* for the lessons, some list of questions that help congregants dig into the text needs to be provided. (3) The small group is important to the success of the exercise. People gain insights from others that they would never gain on their own. A small group (8-12 people) is better than a large one because the larger a group becomes the less some in the group will talk, but it is often those very people that have much to offer. (4) Although it is difficult to keep people focused on actually putting what they have learned into practice, this is an important component to the exercise. One way of reminding participants of this is by emails during the week coming from their group leader. In addition, when group members know that they are going to be asked about it, they tend to make more of an attempt to engage in it.

I have continued to engage in this practice twice a year (Fall and Spring). Our congregation has been very receptive. On multiple occasions Home Group leaders have told me that this exercise is where they get the most and best discussion from their group members. Group members have repeatedly reported being most satisfied when doing this, as opposed to watching a video or reading through a book together.

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